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Le Berre et al.

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(54) **PRODUCTION OF ACETIC ACID WITH ENHANCED CATALYST STABILITY**

(56) **References Cited**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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C07C 53/08 (2006.01)

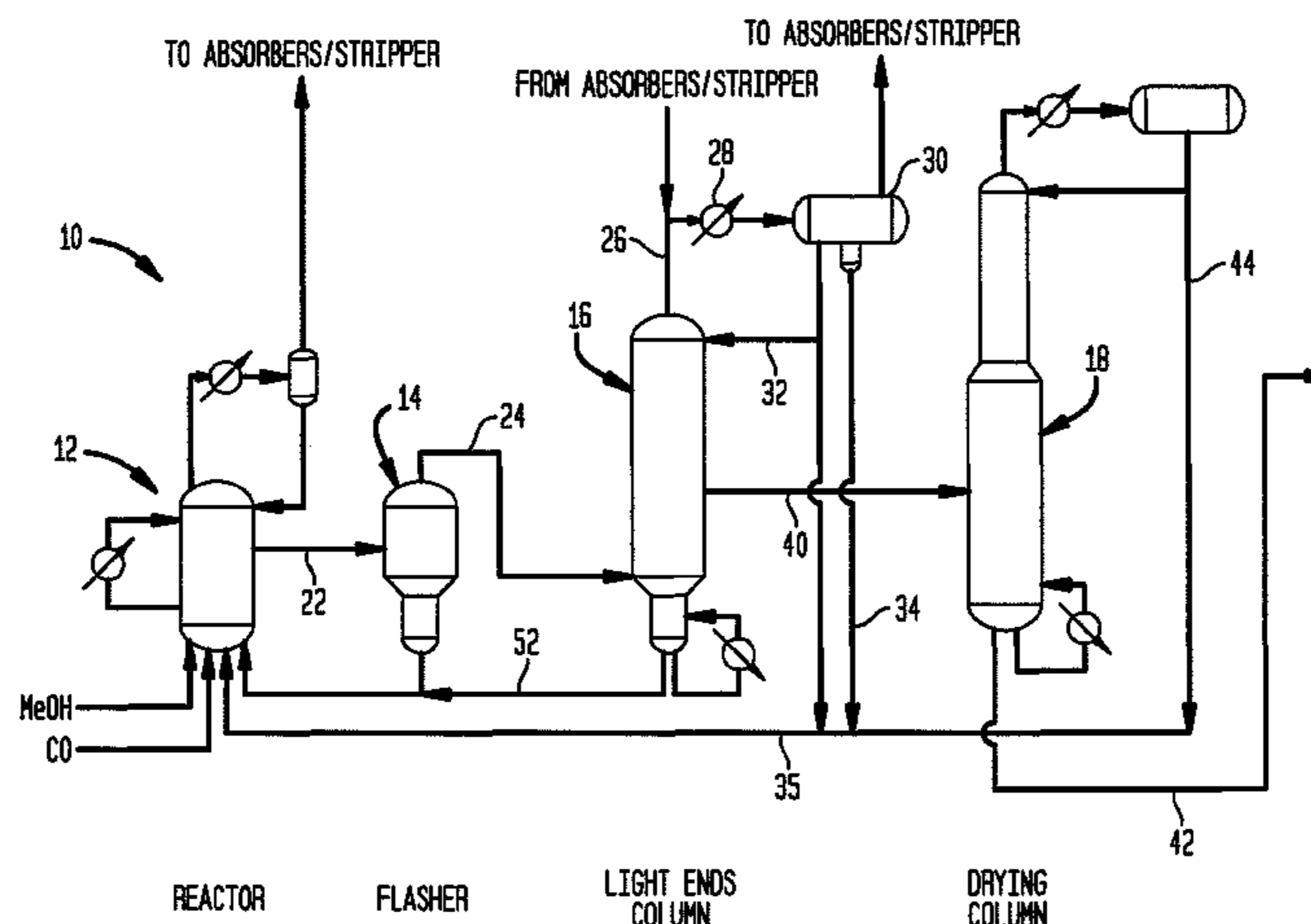
(57) **ABSTRACT**

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 USPC **562/519**; 562/607

Processes for the production of acetic acid by carbonylation of methanol and reactive derivatives thereof in a liquid phase reaction medium, wherein the reaction medium comprises a finite amount of water, a homogeneous catalyst, an alkyl halide promoter, and a catalyst stabilizer/co-promoter comprising a dissymmetric phosphonium cation.

(58) **Field of Classification Search**
 None
 See application file for complete search history.

45 Claims, 2 Drawing Sheets



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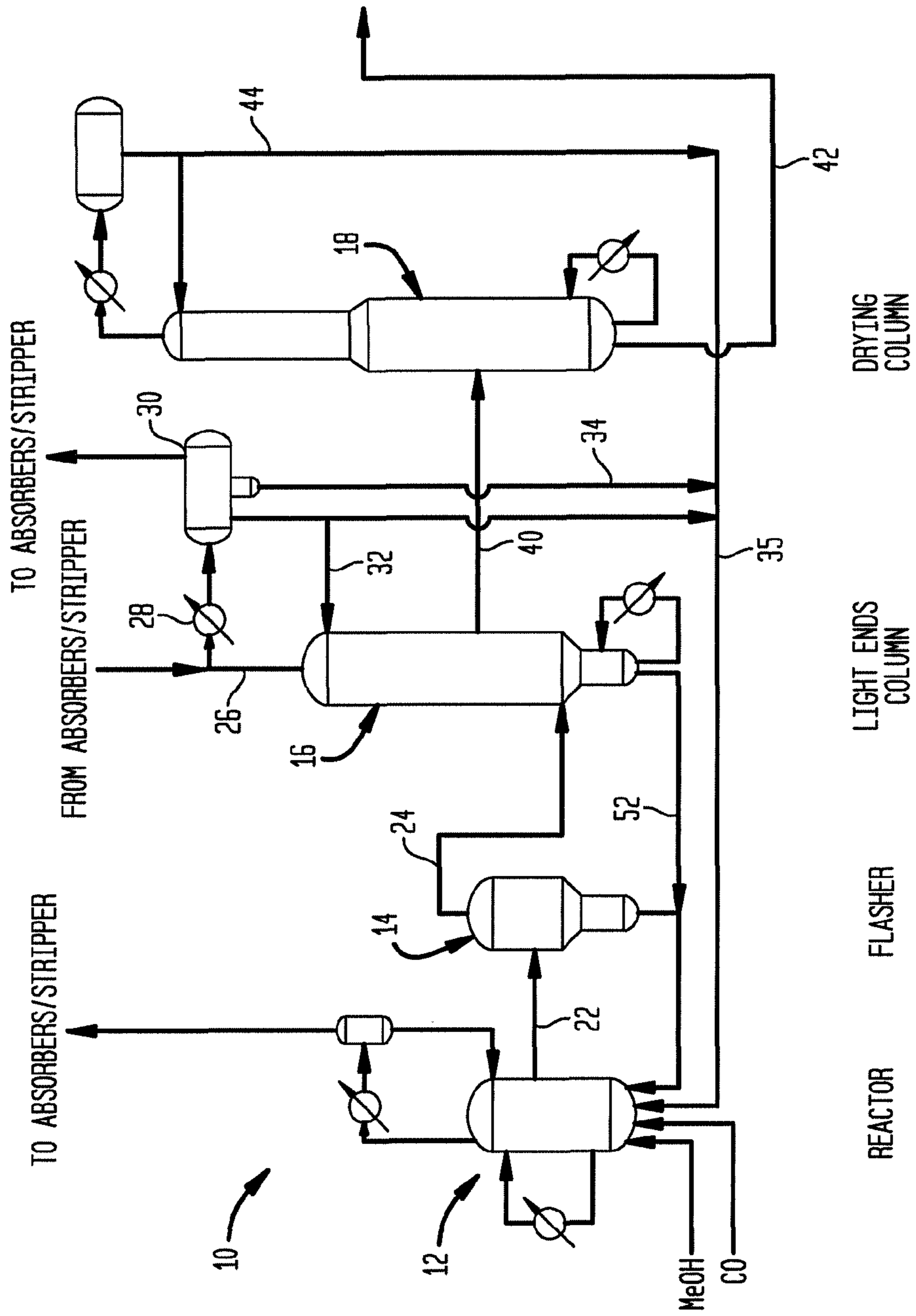


FIGURE 1

Enhanced Rh Stability with Bu₃RPI

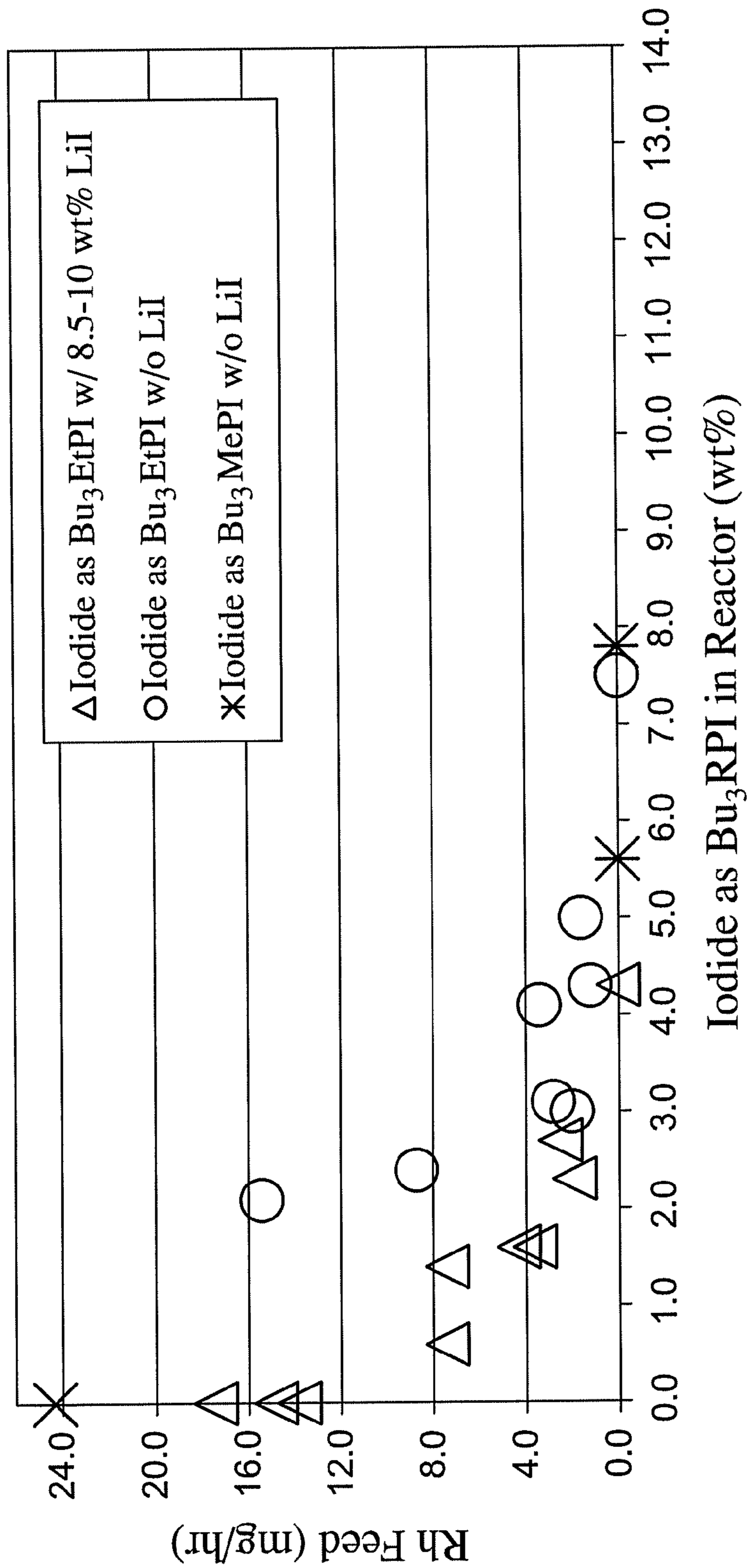


FIGURE 2

1

**PRODUCTION OF ACETIC ACID WITH
ENHANCED CATALYST STABILITY**

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED
APPLICATION

This is a non-provisional of U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/576,514, filed Dec. 16, 2011, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

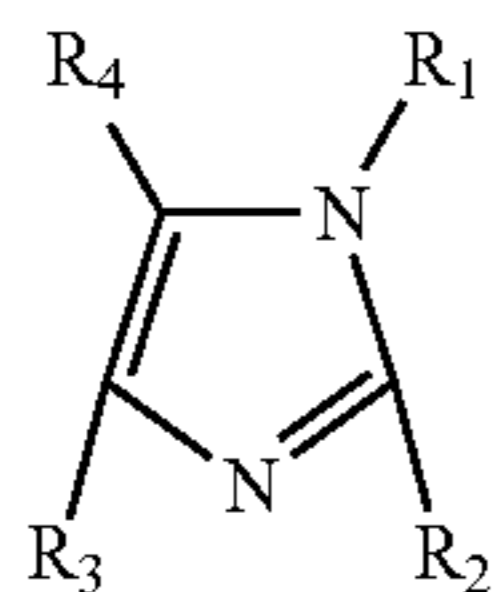
FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to the carbonylation of methanol to produce acetic acid and, in particular, to improving catalyst stability in such processes using one or more dissymmetric phosphonium salts.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A widely used and successful commercial process for synthesizing acetic acid involves the catalyzed carbonylation of methanol with carbon monoxide. The catalyst contains rhodium and/or iridium and a halogen promoter, typically methyl iodide. The reaction is conducted by continuously bubbling carbon monoxide through a liquid reaction medium in which the catalyst is dissolved. The reaction medium comprises acetic acid, methyl acetate, water, methyl iodide and the catalyst. Conventional commercial processes for the carbonylation of methanol include those described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,769,329, 5,001,259, 5,026,908, and 5,144,068, the entireties of which are incorporated herein by reference. Another conventional methanol carbonylation process includes the Cativa™ process, which is discussed in Jones, J. H. (2002), "The Cativa™ Process for the Manufacture of Acetic Acid," *Platinum Metals Review*, 44 (3): 94-105, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

The literature describes the addition of various components to the carbonylation reaction medium in order to increase catalyst stability and/or prevent loss of the catalyst during processing steps. European Patent No. 0 153 834, for example, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference, discloses a process for preparing acetic acid by carbonylation of a methanol feed stock in a liquid reaction medium comprising a rhodium catalyst, an iodide or bromide component, an imidazole stabilizing compound, water and acetic acid. Suitable imidazole stabilizing compounds have the general formula:



wherein R₁, R₂, R₃, and R₄ are each independently hydrogen, alkyl, aryl, cycloalkyl or alkaryl hydrocarbonyl radicals.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,442,107, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference, discloses a process for preparing a carboxylic acid by reaction of carbon monoxide with an alcohol in the presence of a rhodium catalyst in a liquid reaction medium comprising: (a) at least a quantity of water of about 0.1 to 15% by weight; (b) a catalyst stabilizer which is a quaternary ammonium iodide of a heterocyclic nitrogen compound selected from the group consisting of 2-ethyl-4-methylimidazole, 4-methylimidazole, 4-tert-butylpyridine, 2-hy-

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droxypyridine, 3-hydroxypyridine and 4-hydroxypyridine; (c) the iodide derivative corresponding to the alcohol, (d) the ester of the carboxylic acid and the alcohol; (e) a rhodium catalyst, and (f) the carboxylic acid.

U.S. Pat. No. 7,115,774, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference, discloses a process for carbonylating alcohols with carbon monoxide in the liquid phase, wherein the process comprises a halogenated promoter in at least one non-aqueous ionic liquid comprising at least one salt of the formula Q⁺A⁻, in which Q⁺ represents a quaternary ammonium and/or a quaternary phosphonium cation, and A⁻ is an anion capable of forming a liquid salt below 90° C. Suitable quaternary ammonium and/or quaternary phosphonium cations include N-butylpyridinium hexafluorophosphate, N-ethyl pyridinium tetrafluoroborate, pyridinium fluorosulfonate, 3-butyl-1-methylimidazolium tetrafluoroborate, 3-butyl-1-methylimidazolium hexafluoroantimonate, 3-butyl-1-methylimidazolium hexafluorophosphate, 3-butyl-1-methylimidazolium trifluoromethylsulfonate, 3-butyl-1-methylimidazolium bis(trifluoromethylsulfonyl)amide, trimethylphenylammonium hexafluorophosphate and tetrabutylphosphonium tetrafluoroborate.

U.S. Pat. No. 7,582,792, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference, discloses a carbonylation process for the production of a carboxylic acid by combining in a reaction zone a carbonylation feedstock compound comprising an alkanol, a Group VIII metal carbonylation catalyst comprising rhodium (Rh), iridium (Ir), or a compound thereof; an onium salt compound comprising a 1,3-dialkylimidazolium iodide or an N-alkylpyridinium iodide; and carbon monoxide under carbonylation conditions of pressure and temperature, wherein neither hydrogen iodide nor an alkyl iodide exogenous or extraneous to the carbonylation process is added or supplied to the reaction zone.

U.S. Pat. No. 5,144,068, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference, discloses a process for producing acetic acid by reacting methanol with carbon monoxide in a liquid reaction medium containing a rhodium (Rh) catalyst and comprising water, acetic acid, methyl iodide, and methyl acetate, wherein catalyst stability is maintained in the reaction by maintaining in said reaction medium during the course of said reaction about 0.1 wt. % to less than 14 wt. % of water together with (a) an effective amount in the range of about 2 wt. % to 20 wt. % of a catalyst stabilizer selected from the group consisting of iodide salts which are soluble in said reaction medium in effective concentration at reaction temperature, (b) about 5 wt. % to 20 wt. % of methyl iodide, and (c) about 0.5 wt. % to 30 wt. % of methyl acetate. Suitable iodide salts may be a quaternary iodide salt or an iodide salt of a member of the group consisting of the metals of Group IA and Group IIA of the Periodic Table.

U.S. Pat. No. 7,005,541, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference, discloses a process for producing acetic acid by carbonylation of methanol in a reaction medium having low water content whereby carbon monoxide is reacted with methanol in the presence of a catalyst system comprising a Group VIII metal catalyst, namely rhodium (Rh), iridium (Ir), cobalt (Co), nickel (Ni), ruthenium (Ru), palladium (Pd) or platinum (Pt), a halogen promoter (i.e. an alkyl iodide such as methyl iodide), and a stabilizer/co-promoter. The catalyst system is dissolved in a liquid medium comprising methyl acetate, acetic acid, a finite amount of water (e.g., at least about 0.1 wt. %) and any other compatible solvent. The stabilizer/co-promoter of the catalyst system may be in the form of a soluble salt from an alkali metal, an alkaline earth metal or a quaternary ammonium or phosphonium salt, particularly an iodide or acetate salt, which gener-

ates an effective amount of iodide ions in the reaction medium. The amount of iodide present in the reaction medium is between about 2 and 20 wt. %, and the concentration of alkyl iodide (i.e. methyl iodide) in the reaction medium is between about 2 and 30 wt. %. Suitable catalyst stabilizers or co-promoters include lithium iodide, lithium acetate or mixtures thereof.

U.S. Pat. No. 7,678,939, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference, discloses a process for producing acetic acid by carbonylation of methanol wherein catalyst stability is achieved by maintaining, in the reaction medium, a rhodium-based catalyst system having a halogen promoter and an iodide salt co-promoter wherein the iodide salt co-promoter has an iodide concentration of greater than about 3 wt. %. Suitable iodide salt co-promoters include a soluble salt of an alkali metal or alkaline earth metal or a quaternary ammonium or phosphonium salt. At least one ruthenium catalyst stabilizer, at least one tin catalyst stabilizer, or mixtures thereof are also incorporated into the catalyst system. The water concentration of the reaction medium is between 0.1 to 14 wt. %.

As reflected above, various processes exist for the production of acetic acid utilizing a catalyst system comprising, for example, a Group VIII metal catalyst, such as a rhodium-based catalyst, in conjunction with a halogen promoter and/or stabilizer. As a promoter and/or stabilizer, the above references disclose the use of a soluble salt from an alkali metal, an alkaline earth metal or a quaternary ammonium or phosphonium salt (e.g., quaternary iodide salts; quaternary ammonium iodides of a heterocyclic nitrogen compound). However, even in view of the above described processes, there still remains a need for novel processes for producing acetic acid with improved catalyst stability.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides improved processes for advantageously increasing catalyst stability in an acetic acid production process by maintaining a certain concentration of one or more dissymmetric phosphonium salts to the reaction medium. Unlike symmetric phosphonium cations, such as tetrabutyl phosphonium cation, which form insoluble rhodium complexes at reaction conditions, it has now surprisingly and unexpectedly been found that certain dissymmetric phosphonium cations, such as tributyl(ethyl)phosphonium cation, lead to improved catalyst stability and thereby inhibit or prevent catalyst precipitation and rhodium carbonyl complex crystallization during reactor operations.

In a first embodiment, the present invention is directed to a process for producing acetic acid. The process comprises reacting carbon monoxide in the liquid phase with at least one reactant selected from the group consisting of methanol, methyl acetate, methyl formate, dimethyl ether and mixtures thereof in a reactor containing a reaction medium to produce a reaction product comprising acetic acid. The reaction medium comprises a finite amount of water, a homogeneous catalyst such as rhodium and/or iridium, an alkyl halide promoter, and a catalyst stabilizer comprising a dissymmetric phosphonium cation $[PR_1R_2R_3R_4]^+$ as an iodide salt, wherein R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 are each independently a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl or cycloalkyl group. The reaction medium is maintained at a total iodide ion concentration of from 2 to 35 wt. %, e.g., from 3 to 35 wt. %, and an alkyl halide promoter concentration of greater than 1 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium. R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 preferably are not all the same substituted or unsubstituted alkyl or cycloalkyl. In one aspect R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 are all C_2

or greater (C_{2+}) alkyl or cycloalkyl groups. In another aspect, R_1 , R_2 and R_3 are identical and selected from the group consisting of C_4 (butyl), C_6 (hexyl), C_8 (octyl), C_{10} (decyl), C_{12} (dodecyl), C_{14} (tetradecyl), C_{16} (hexadecyl), cyclopentyl, and cyclohexyl, and R_4 is a C_2 or greater alkyl. Optionally R_4 is selected from the group consisting of C_1 (methyl), C_2 (ethyl), C_4 (butyl), C_5 (pentyl), C_6 (hexyl), C_8 (octyl), C_{10} (decyl) and C_{12} (dodecyl). Optionally, the phosphonium ion is tributyl(ethyl)phosphonium ion.

In another embodiment, the invention is to a process for producing acetic acid, the process comprising reacting carbon monoxide in the liquid phase with at least one reactant selected from the group consisting of methanol, methyl acetate, methyl formate, dimethyl ether and mixtures thereof in a reactor containing a reaction medium to produce a reaction product comprising acetic acid, wherein the reaction medium comprises a finite amount of water, a homogeneous catalyst such as rhodium and/or iridium, an alkyl halide promoter, and a catalyst stabilizer comprising a phosphonium cation $[R_3PR'_1]^+$ or $[R_2PR'_2]^+$ wherein R is straight or branched butyl, hexyl, or octyl or cycloalkyl; and R' is methyl, ethyl, propyl, or straight or branched butyl, hexyl, octyl, decyl, dodecyl, tetradecyl or hexadecyl or cycloalkyl, with the proviso that R and R' are different. The reaction medium is preferably maintained at a total iodide ion concentration of from 2 to 35 wt. %, e.g., from 3 to 35 wt. %, and an alkyl halide promoter concentration of greater than 1 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium. R and R' preferably are C_{2+} alkyl groups.

Optionally, the phosphonium cation is maintained in the reaction medium at a concentration of from 1.5 wt. % to 28 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium. The catalyst stabilizer is preferably effective in maintaining at least 99% of the homogeneous catalyst solubilized in the reaction medium when cooled to at least 20° C. The alkyl halide promoter preferably is maintained in the reaction medium at a concentration greater than 5 wt. %.

The specific catalyst stabilizer employed in the inventive process may vary, but optionally has a melting point less than 170° C. or may be a liquid at 25° C. In some preferred aspects, the catalyst stabilizer comprises tributyl(ethyl)phosphonium ion, tributyl(octyl)phosphonium ion, trioctyl(methyl)phosphonium ion, or trioctyl(ethyl)phosphonium ion. In other embodiments, the catalyst stabilizer may be selected from the group consisting of tris(2-methylpropyl)(butyl)phosphonium iodide, tris(2-methylbutyl)(3-methylbutyl)phosphonium iodide, tricyclohexyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, tridecyl(octyl)phosphonium iodide, trioctyl(decyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(butyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(octyl)phosphonium iodide and mixtures thereof.

The water concentration in the reaction medium optionally is maintained at from 0.1 wt. % to 8 wt. %. The process optionally provides a carbonylation rate from 10 to 40 mol/l/hr, e.g., from 15 to 20 mol/l/hr. The reaction medium preferably is maintained at a total iodide ion to catalyst molar ratio of from 25:1 to 950:1. The reaction medium optionally further comprises a metal iodide salt, e.g., LiI. In one aspect, the reaction medium further comprises an alkali or alkaline earth metal iodide salt at a phosphonium to alkali or alkaline earth metal molar ratio of from 1:100 to 100:1, e.g., 1:10 to 10:1. The reaction medium optionally further comprises methyl acetate, and the process further comprises the step of maintaining the reaction medium at a methyl acetate concentration from 0.5 to 20 wt. %, e.g., from 0.5 to 10 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

In another embodiment, the invention is to acetic acid formed by the inventive processes of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

The present invention will be better understood in view of the appended non-limiting figures, in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates an exemplary carbonylation system according to one embodiment of the invention; and

FIG. 2 is a graph plotting rhodium feed required as a function of iodide content in the reactor as Bu_3RPI from Examples S-W and 37-54.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Introduction

The carbonylation of alcohols, such as methanol, with carbon monoxide is widely used for the production of acetic acid, as disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 3,769,329, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety. A rhodium-based or iridium-based catalyst, in addition to a halogen-containing catalyst promoter (e.g., methyl iodide), is generally utilized in such processes. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 3,769,329 discloses the use of a rhodium-based carbonylation catalyst dissolved or dispersed in a liquid reaction medium or supported on an inert solid, along with a halogen-containing catalyst promoter such as methyl iodide.

One major challenge with designing processes for the production of acetic acid by the carbonylation of alcohols involves the discovery of novel and effective processes for the production of acetic acid that: (1) inhibit or prevent catalyst from inactivating and precipitating out of the reaction medium or flash vessel; and (2) inhibit or prevent crystallization of rhodium carbonyl complexes, without adversely affecting reaction rates. Particularly in commercial settings, catalyst inactivation and precipitation can lead to slower reaction rates, interruptions in unit operations, and/or complete reactor shutdown.

Although it has been reported that problems with catalyst stability may be minimized, for example, with the use of a catalyst stabilizer such as a soluble metal iodide or quaternary iodide salt, any resulting increases in catalyst stability often come at the expense of a negative effect on reaction rates. That is, even in cases where a process is modified to have enhanced catalyst stability (i.e., through the use of a quaternary iodide salt catalyst stabilizer), the realized reaction rate of the modified process may be less than half of what would have been expected under the original conditions. Therefore, it would be useful to provide processes for the production of acetic acid that not only provide superior catalyst stability, but which also do so without generating a negative effect on reaction rate.

It has now surprisingly and unexpectedly been discovered that catalyst stability in a carbonylation process for producing acetic acid can be significantly improved by including, in the carbonylation reactor medium, a dissymmetric quaternary phosphonium cation, optionally in combination with one or more inorganic iodide salt(s) (e.g., lithium iodide, sodium iodide or potassium iodide). In this context, the term "dissymmetric" refers to phosphonium salts having a phosphonium cation $[\text{PR}_1\text{R}_2\text{R}_3\text{R}_4]^+$, wherein R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 are each independently a straight or branched, substituted or unsubstituted, alkyl or cycloalkyl group, with the proviso that R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 are not all the same alkyl or cycloalkyl group, although some of R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 may be the same alkyl or cycloalkyl group.

Particularly surprising features of the inventive processes include, but are not limited to: (1) increased rhodium catalyst stability without creating an adverse effect on carbonylation rates; (2) inhibition or absence of catalyst precipitation during the reaction run; and (3) inhibition or absence of rhodium carbonyl complex crystallization during the reaction run. It is believed that the presence of dissymmetric phosphonium ions in a catalyst system for a process for producing acetic acid by carbonylation produces superior results with respect to catalyst stability.

In view of the foregoing, in one embodiment, the invention is directed to a process for producing acetic acid comprising the steps of reacting carbon monoxide in the liquid phase with at least one reactant selected from the group consisting of methanol, methyl acetate, methyl formate, dimethyl ether and mixtures thereof in a reactor containing a reaction medium to produce a reaction product comprising acetic acid, and maintaining the reaction medium at a total iodide concentration of from 2 to 35 wt. % and an alkyl halide promoter concentration of greater than 1 wt. %, e.g., greater than 5 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium. In one embodiment, the reaction medium comprises a finite amount of water, a homogeneous catalyst, and an alkyl halide promoter. The reaction medium also preferably contains a catalyst stabilizer comprising a dissymmetric phosphonium cation $[\text{PR}_1\text{R}_2\text{R}_3\text{R}_4]^+$, preferably as an iodide salt, wherein each of R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 is a straight or branched, substituted or unsubstituted, alkyl or cycloalkyl group. It is preferred that at least one of R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 is different from the other(s). In one aspect, each of R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 is a C_{2+} group (i.e., comprising two or more carbon atoms), but not all the same C_{2+} group. In a preferred embodiment, an inorganic iodide stabilizer, such as lithium iodide, is used in combination with the phosphonium cation-containing catalyst stabilizer.

Carbonylation of Alcohols

The invention relates to processes for producing acetic acid by carbonylation of alkyl alcohols, reactive derivatives of alkyl alcohols, and mixtures thereof. In particular, the invention relates to such carbonylation processes taking place at water concentrations from 0.1 wt. % to 14 wt. % of the reaction medium in which the carbonylation reaction takes place. Furthermore, the processes described herein relate to carbonylation reactions catalyzed by a rhodium-based or iridium-based catalyst system in the presence of a halogen catalyst promoter, optionally elemental iodine (I_2), hydrogen iodide (HI) or an organic iodide such as methyl iodide, and one or more stabilizers, which provide an iodide ion concentration equivalent to greater than 2 wt. %, optionally greater than 3 wt. %, in the reaction medium. According to the present invention, the one or more stabilizers include at least one dissymmetric phosphonium salt, more preferably a dissymmetric phosphonium iodide salt, in the reaction medium to stabilize the rhodium-based catalyst systems incorporating the halogen promoter. In one optional embodiment, the one or more iodide salts includes the phosphonium salt in combination with an inorganic iodide salt co-promoter, such as lithium, sodium or potassium iodide.

An important aspect of the processes described herein is the surprising and unexpected discovery that carbonylation catalyst stability may be advantageously enhanced by incorporating dissymmetric phosphonium cations into the reaction medium, which optionally may be used in combination with an inorganic iodide co-promoter, such as lithium iodide, preferably in a low water carbonylation environment. The use of dissymmetric phosphonium cations also does not appreciably reduce carbonylation rates, and in some embodiments has been demonstrated to enhance carbonylation rates. In some

embodiments, for example, the carbonylation rate may be at least 15.0 mol/l/hr, e.g., at least 15.5 mol/l/hr, at least 16.0 mol/l/hr, at least 17.0 or at least 18.0 mol/l/hr. In terms of ranges, the carbonylation rate optionally ranges from 10.0 to 40.0 mol/l/hr, from 15.0 to 20.0 mol/l/hr, from 16.0 to 20.0 mol/l/hr, from 17.0 to 20.0 mol/l/hr, or from 18.0 to 20.0 mol/l/hr.

The catalyst stabilizer preferably comprises a phosphonium cation of the formula: $[PR_1R_2R_3R_4]^+$ as an iodide, hydroxide or carboxylate salt, e.g., acetate salt, wherein R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 are each independently a substituted or unsubstituted alkyl or cycloalkyl group, but are not all the same alkyl or cycloalkyl group, although some of R_1 , R_2 , R_3 , and R_4 may be the same group. Illustrative examples of suitable cycloalkyl groups include, but are not limited to, cyclopentyl and cyclohexyl groups. Exemplary alkyl groups include methyl, ethyl, propyl, butyl, pentyl, hexyl, heptyl, octyl, nonyl, decyl, dodecyl, tetradecyl, and hexadecyl. In some embodiments, R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 may be substituted compounds. Illustrative examples of suitable substituents include, but are not limited to, hydroxyl groups and halides. Preferably, the phosphonium cation does not include any aromatic substituents, e.g., is free of phenyl groups, as the presence of such moieties may enhance rhodium carbonyl complex crystallization leading to reduced catalyst activity.

In certain embodiments, the water concentrations in the reaction mediums in the processes described herein are maintained from 0.1 wt. % to 14 wt. %. More preferably, the water concentration in the reaction medium described herein is maintained from 0.1 wt. % to 8 wt. %. In other embodiments, the water concentrations in the reaction mediums in the processes described herein is maintained from 0.1 wt. % to 6 wt. %. In still other embodiments, the water concentrations in the reaction mediums in the processes described herein are maintained from 0.1 wt. % to 4 wt. %, or 0.1 wt. % to 2 wt. %.

The incorporation of at least one of the dissymmetric phosphonium salts in the reaction medium reduces the tendency of rhodium in the rhodium-based catalyst system to crystallize and/or precipitate out of solution during the production and purification of acetic acid. Rhodium compounds are particularly susceptible to instability leading to precipitation of the rhodium catalyst as RhI_3 during recovery of acetic acid, particularly in the flasher unit. Rhodium is a very expensive metal and loss of the metal through precipitation may have significant negative financial impact on commercial acetic acid production processes by affecting catalyst usage and maintenance of high production.

None of the known systems disclose the use of dissymmetric phosphonium cations of the type claimed herein in homogeneous carbonylation processes under low water conditions to stabilize rhodium without causing precipitation or crystallization of rhodium carbonyl complexes. The processes described herein recognize that this unique combination of carbonylation system components provides significant stability to rhodium-based homogeneous catalyst systems. In a preferred embodiment, the processes described herein relate to the use of rhodium-based catalyst systems, although they could also be employed in iridium-based catalyst systems or a system comprising both rhodium and iridium. For purposes of this disclosure, a "rhodium-based catalyst system" or "rhodium-based catalyst" means a catalyst system providing a rhodium metal concentration in a methanol carbonylation reaction medium of at least 300 wppm.

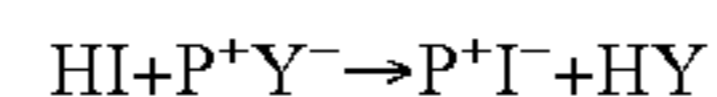
In certain embodiments, the rhodium-based catalyst systems described herein provide from 300 wppm to 5,000 wppm of rhodium in the reaction medium. In other embodiments, the rhodium-based catalyst systems described herein

provide from 1,000 wppm to 4,000 wppm of rhodium in the reaction medium. In still other embodiments, the rhodium-based catalyst systems described herein provide from 2,000 wppm to 3,000 wppm of rhodium in the reaction medium. In certain embodiments, the rhodium concentration in the reaction medium is at least 1000 wppm. In other embodiments, the rhodium concentration in the reaction medium is at least 1500 wppm. In still other embodiments, the rhodium concentration in the reaction medium is at least 2000 wppm.

In addition to rhodium and/or iridium, the reaction mediums of the processes described herein also may include the use of a halogen promoter, such as elemental iodine, hydrogen iodide and/or an organic iodide and an alkali or alkaline earth metal iodide salt co-promoter, such as lithium iodide. In certain embodiments, the organic iodide is an alkyl iodide such as methyl iodide. The alkyl iodide may be maintained, for example, in the reaction medium at a concentration of from 2.0 wt. % to 30 wt. %. In other embodiments, the alkyl iodide is maintained at a concentration in the reaction medium of 5.0 wt. % to 15 wt. %. In still another embodiment, the alkyl iodide is maintained in the reaction medium at a concentration of 5.0 wt. % to 10.0 wt. %.

According to the invention, the stabilizer used in the reaction medium includes at least one phosphonium salt, preferably a dissymmetric phosphonium salt. In one embodiment, the phosphonium salt comprises a phosphonium iodide salt. In another embodiment, the phosphonium stabilizer comprises a phosphonium carboxylate (e.g., acetate), halide, hydroxide, or a mixture thereof.

The phosphonium salt stabilizer may be added to the reaction medium as an iodide salt or as a non-iodide salt that will generate an iodide salt in the reaction medium. In such cases, the non-iodide salt will react with HI and be converted to the corresponding phosphonium iodide salt by the following equation:



where Y^- is an anion other than an iodide anion, e.g., carboxylate (optionally acetate), hydroxide or a halide other than iodide.

In addition to the phosphonium stabilizer, the process optionally may employ a co-promoter that is a soluble inorganic salt, preferably of an alkali metal, optionally lithium iodide or sodium iodide, or of an alkaline earth metal. For example, lithium iodide, lithium acetate, or a mixture thereof may be employed. The inorganic salt co-promoter may be added as a non-iodide salt that will generate an iodide salt in the reaction solution. The iodide catalyst stabilizer may be introduced directly into the reaction system. Alternatively, the iodide salt may be generated in situ since under the operating conditions of the reaction system, a wide range of non-iodide salt precursors will react with methyl iodide to generate the corresponding co-promoter iodide salt stabilizer. For additional detail regarding iodide salt generation, see U.S. Pat. No. 5,001,259 to Smith et al.; U.S. Pat. No. 5,026,908 to Smith et al.; and U.S. Pat. No. 5,144,068 also to Smith et al., the entireties of which are incorporated herein by reference.

In another embodiment, the phosphonium stabilizer may be formed in situ from an organophosphine reactant. In this aspect, one or more phosphines may be added to the reaction medium, which will react with alkyl iodides to generate the desired phosphonium iodide salt. For example, in one embodiment, tributylphosphine and methyl iodide are added to the reaction medium, resulting in the generation of tributyl (methyl)phosphonium iodide within the reactor.

The phosphonium iodide salt is preferably maintained in the reaction medium in an amount sufficient to effectively

stabilize the rhodium or iridium catalyst. The concentrations of the phosphonium iodide and optional inorganic co-promoter, e.g., LiI, are such that they maintain a total iodide ion concentration in the reaction medium of greater than 2 wt. %, optionally greater than 3 wt. %, optionally from 2 to 35 wt. %, from 3 to 35 wt. %, from 4 to 35 wt. % or from 5 to 35 wt. %. In still other embodiments, the concentration of these co-promoter(s) are such that they maintain a total iodide ion concentration in the reaction medium of from 2 to 20 wt. %, e.g., from 5 to 15 wt. %, or from 5 to 10 wt. %. In some aspects, the phosphonium cations may enable surprisingly high total iodide concentrations in the reaction medium of, for example, from 20 to 35 wt. %, from 20 to 30 wt. % or from 20 to 25 wt. %. The phosphonium cation itself is preferably maintained in the reaction medium in an amount from 1.5 wt. % to 28 wt. %, e.g., from 2 to 23 wt. % or from 5 to 18 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction solution. In terms of lower limits, the concentration of the catalyst stabilizer(s)/co-promoter(s) in the reaction medium are preferably such that they maintain an iodide ion concentration in the reaction medium of at least 2 wt. %, at least 3 wt. %, at least 5 wt. %, at least 10 wt. %, at least 15 wt. %, at least 20 wt. %, at least 25 wt. %, or at least 30 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium. In terms of upper limits, the catalyst stabilizer(s)/co-promoter(s) in the reaction medium preferably are such that they maintain an iodide ion concentration of less than 35 wt. %, such as less than 30 wt. %, less than 25 wt. %, less than 20 wt. %, less than 15 wt. %, or less than 10 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

When the phosphonium iodide salt is maintained in combination with an inorganic iodide salt, such as lithium iodide, it is preferred that such salts are present in an amount sufficient to maintain the desired iodide concentration in the reaction solution. The relative ratios of the two components may vary widely. In one embodiment, for example, the molar ratio of phosphonium cation to alkali or alkaline earth metal cation in the reaction solution is maintained at from 1:100 to 100:1, e.g., from 1:50 to 50:1, from 1:10 to 10:1, from 1:3 to 1:1, or 1:2.

The stabilizing iodide co-promoter(s) may be maintained in the reaction medium at a total iodide ion to homogeneous catalyst (typically rhodium or iridium) molar ratio of 1:1 to 1000:1. In other embodiments, the total iodide concentration may be maintained in the reaction medium at a molar concentration of total iodide ion to rhodium/iridium of 25:1 to 950:1 or from 40:1 to 120:1. In still other embodiments, the total iodide concentration may be maintained in the reaction medium at a molar concentration of total iodide ion to rhodium/iridium from 60:1 to 100:1.

Generally, it is preferred that the phosphonium salt has a melting point that is below the temperature at which the carbonylation reaction is to be carried out. The melting point of the iodide salt depends, in part, upon the particular hydrocarbon groups (R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4) that are bound to the phosphorous atom as well as the degree symmetry or dissymmetry of the phosphonium cation. In preferred embodiments, R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 are chosen so as to provide salts having low melting temperatures. To that end, the melting point of the iodide salt generally decreases as the number of carbon atoms that are present increases. The presence of a branched (versus straight-chained) structure also may lead to lower melting points. Furthermore, selecting R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 such that they are not all the same may also lower the melting point of the iodide salt.

In some embodiments, the phosphonium salt employed has a melting point of less than 170° C., e.g., less than 160° C., less than 155° C., less than 150° C., less than 145° C. or less

than 140° C. In terms of lower limits, the phosphonium salt of the reaction medium may have a melting point of at least -100° C., at least 0° C., at least 20° C., at least 50° C., at least 70° C., at least 100° C., at least 110° C., at least 125° C., or at least 140° C. In terms of ranges, the phosphonium salt of the reaction medium may have a melting point in the range of -100° C. to 170° C., e.g., from 0° C. to 160° C., from 20° C. to 160° C., from 50° C. to 155° C., from 100° C. to 150° C., or from 125° C. to 150° C. In one embodiment, the phosphonium salt is a liquid at room temperature (25° C.) and 1 atmosphere.

As noted above, some of R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 may be the same so long as they are not all the same, or they may be all different. In one embodiment, R_1 and R_2 are the same, and R_3 and R_4 are the same, but R_1/R_2 are different from R_3/R_4 . In another embodiment, three of R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 are the same and one of R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 is different. In some embodiments, all of R_1 , R_2 , R_3 and R_4 are C_{2+} alkyl groups. In one non-limiting embodiment, the phosphonium ion comprises an ion of the formula: $[R_3PR']^+$ or $[R_2PR'_2]^+$, wherein R is straight or branched butyl, hexyl, or octyl or cycloalkyl, and R' is methyl, ethyl, propyl, or straight or branched butyl, hexyl, octyl, decyl, dodecyl, tetradecyl or hexadecyl or cycloalkyl, with the proviso that R and R' are different.

In other embodiments, R_1 , R_2 , and R_3 may all be identical, and differ from R_4 . In such embodiments, R_1 , R_2 and R_3 may be selected, for example, from the group consisting of C_4 (butyl), C_6 (hexyl), C_8 (octyl), C_{12} (dodecyl), C_{14} (tetradecyl), C_{16} (hexadecyl), cyclopentyl and cyclohexyl, and R_4 is methyl or a C_2 or greater alkyl. Optionally, the phosphonium ion is tributyl(ethyl)phosphonium ion.

In some embodiments, the catalyst stabilizer/co-promoter is selected from the group consisting of tris(2-methylpropyl) (butyl)phosphonium iodide, tris(2-methylbutyl)(3-methylbutyl)phosphonium iodide, tributyl(ethyl)phosphonium, trioctyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, tributyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, tricyclohexyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, tridecyl(octyl)phosphonium iodide, trioctyl(butyl)phosphonium iodide, trioctyl(decyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(butyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(octyl)phosphonium iodide and mixtures thereof. This listing is not exclusive and is not meant to limit the scope of the invention.

As indicated above, the specific dissymmetric phosphonium salt employed may vary widely so long as the phosphonium cation employed is dissymmetric, as defined above. Additional exemplary, but not exclusive, dissymmetric phosphonium cations suitable for the phosphonium salts of the present invention are provided below in Table 1. It should be understood that independent of the specific counterion employed in the phosphonium salt that is added to the reaction medium, e.g., iodide or carboxylate (e.g., acetate) anion, the stabilizing phosphonium iodide form will be generated therein.

TABLE 1

Dissymmetric Quaternary Phosphonium Cations				
Name	R_1	R_2	R_3	R_4
Trimethyl(ethyl)	Me	Me	Me	Et
Dimethyl(diethyl)	Me	Me	Et	Et
Trimethyl(butyl)	Me	Me	Me	Bu
Dimethyl(dibutyl)	Me	Me	Bu	Bu
Trimethyl(hexyl)	Me	Me	Me	Hex
Dimethyl(dihexyl)	Me	Me	Hex	Hex
Trimethyl(octyl)	Me	Me	Me	Oct

TABLE 1-continued

Dissymmetric Quaternary Phosphonium Cations				
Name	R ₁	R ₂	R ₃	R ₄
Dimethyl(dioctyl)	Me	Me	Oct	Oct
Triethyl(methyl)	Et	Et	Et	Me
Diethyl(dimethyl)	Et	Et	Me	Me
Triethyl(butyl)	Et	Et	Et	Bu
Diethyl(dibutyl)	Et	Et	Bu	Bu
Triethyl(hexyl)	Et	Et	Et	Hex
Diethyl(dihexyl)	Et	Et	Hex	Hex
Triethyl(octyl)	Et	Et	Et	Oct
Diethyl(dioctyl)	Et	Et	Oct	Oct
Tributyl(methyl)	Bu	Bu	Bu	Me
Dibutyl(dimethyl)	Bu	Bu	Me	Me
Tributyl(ethyl)	Bu	Bu	Bu	Et
Tributyl(hexyl)	Bu	Bu	Bu	Hex
Dibutyl(dihexyl)	Bu	Bu	Hex	Hex
Tributyl(octyl)	Bu	Bu	Bu	Oct
Dibutyl(dioctyl)	Bu	Bu	Oct	Oct
Trihexyl(methyl)	Hex	Hex	Hex	Me
Dihexyl(dimethyl)	Hex	Hex	Me	Me
Trihexyl(ethyl)	Hex	Hex	Hex	Et
Trihexyl(butyl)	Hex	Hex	Hex	Bu
Trihexyl(octyl)	Hex	Hex	Hex	Oct
Dihexyl(dioctyl)	Hex	Hex	Oct	Oct
Trioctyl(methyl)	Oct	Oct	Oct	Me
Dioctyl(dimethyl)	Oct	Oct	Me	Me
Trioctyl(ethyl)	Oct	Oct	Oct	Et
Trioctyl(butyl)	Oct	Oct	Oct	Bu
Trioctyl(hexyl)	Oct	Oct	Oct	Hex
Tricyclohexyl(methyl)	CycloHex	CycloHex	CycloHex	Me
Dicyclohexyl(dimethyl)	CycloHex	CycloHex	Me	Me
Tricyclohexyl(butyl)	CycloHex	CycloHex	CycloHex	Bu
Dicyclohexyl(dibutyl)	CycloHex	CycloHex	Bu	Bu
Tricyclohexyl(octyl)	CycloHex	CycloHex	CycloHex	Oct
Dicyclohexyl(dioctyl)	CycloHex	CycloHex	Oct	Oct

Catalyst crystallization and precipitation can be a particular problem for reaction mediums at temperatures that are below typical reaction temperatures. Such lower temperatures may be encountered, for example, during reactor start up or shut down. Reaction mediums of the present invention, however, may be particularly resistant to catalyst crystallization and precipitation even at such low temperatures. Accordingly, in one embodiment, at least 99% of the homogeneous catalyst remains solubilized in the reaction medium when cooled to at least 25° C. or to at least 20° C.

To provide carbonylation reactions as described herein, all selected reaction medium components are dissolved or dispersed in the reaction medium vessel or reactor. During a period of active reaction, methanol and carbon monoxide are continuously fed to the reactor containing a reaction medium in which a desired partial pressure of carbon monoxide is maintained. The carbonylation reactor is typically a stirred autoclave within which the reacting liquid components are maintained at a constant level. Into the reactor, fresh methanol, sufficient water to maintain the desired concentration of water in the reaction medium, recycled catalyst solution from the flasher base, and typically recycled methyl iodide and methyl acetate from an overhead of the methyl iodide-acetic acid splitter column. In certain embodiments, the methyl acetate is maintained in the reaction medium at a concentration of from 0.5 wt. % to 30 wt. %, e.g., from 0.5 to 20 wt. % or from 0.5 to 10 wt. %. Alternate distillation systems can be employed so long as a means is provided for recovering the crude acetic acid and recycling to the reactor catalyst solution, methyl iodide, and methyl acetate. Carbon monoxide is continuously introduced into the reactor just below the agitator which is used to stir the contents. The carbon monoxide is thoroughly dispersed through the reaction medium. A gaseous purge stream is vented from the head of the reactor to

prevent buildup of gaseous by-products and to maintain a set carbon monoxide partial pressure at a given total reactor pressure. The temperature of the reactor is controlled, and the carbon monoxide is introduced at a rate sufficient to maintain a constant total reactor pressure. The total reactor pressure is from 1.5 MPa to 4.5 MPa absolute, with the reaction temperature typically maintained from 150° C. to 250° C.

Liquid product is drawn off the carbonylation reactor at a rate sufficient to maintain a constant level of the reaction medium and is introduced to a flasher unit. In the flasher unit, a catalyst solution is withdrawn as a base stream incorporating predominantly acetic acid containing rhodium/iridium catalyst, the iodide salt co-promoter, and the phosphonium stabilizer, along with lesser quantities of methyl acetate, the halogen promoter, and water. An overhead stream from the flasher comprises predominately product acetic acid along with methyl iodide, methyl acetate, and water. A portion of the carbon monoxide along with gaseous by-products such as methane, hydrogen, and carbon dioxide exit the top of the flasher. For additional information regarding acetic acid production systems and schemes, see U.S. Pat. No. 4,433,166 to Singleton et al.; U.S. Pat. No. 5,144,068 to Smith et al.; U.S. Pat. No. 6,677,480 to Huckman et al., and U.S. Pat. No. 7,053,241 to Torrence, each of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. For more information regarding specific process for producing acetic through carbonylation reactions, see the publication: Graub, M., Seidel, A., Torrence, P., Heymann, P., *Synthesis of Acetic Acid and Acetic Acid Anhydride from Methanol*. Applied Homogeneous Catalysis with Organometallic Compounds. (1996), Volume 1, 104-138. Editor(s): Cornils, B., Herrmann, W., Publisher: VCH, Weinheim, Germany, each of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

As indicated above, the carbonylation system preferably is a homogeneous carbonylation system, meaning that the catalyst and reactor solution are preferably in the same phase, e.g., liquid phase. Embodiments of the inventive process described herein relate to the use of homogeneous catalyst systems, preferably homogeneous rhodium-based or iridium-based catalyst systems.

A non-limiting exemplary carbonylation system is shown in appended FIG. 1. As shown, FIG. 1 includes a carbonylation unit 10 of the class preferably utilized in connection with the present invention. Unit 10 includes a reactor 12, a flasher 14, a light ends column 16, a drying or dehydration column 18 as well as optionally further purification, such as a heavy ends column to remove higher boiling impurities (not shown). Reactor 12 includes the reaction medium to which methanol and carbon monoxide are fed. A portion of the reaction medium is continuously provided to flasher 14 via line 22 where crude product is flashed and sent to light ends column 16 via line 24 as a hot vapor feed.

In column 16, the product is purified of light components which exit the column via line 26, are condensed in a first condenser 28 and then decanted in a decanter 30. Conventionally, the light phase from decanter 30 is refluxed to column 16 via line 32, while the heavy phase from decanter 30 is returned to the reactor via lines 34, 35. Also provided, but not shown, are absorbers and strippers used to recycle material into the system.

A purified product stream 40 is withdrawn as a (preferably liquid) side stream from column 16 and fed to drying column 18 where water is removed from the partially purified product. Product is withdrawn via line 42. If necessary, further purification may be done. The overhead and some product acetic acid is used as reflux for column 18 or recycled to the

reactor via line 44. Column 16 generates a liquid residue stream 52 which is conventionally recycled with flasher residue to the reactor as shown.

In some embodiments, at least some of the raw materials (or reactor feed materials) for the above-described carbonylation process may be derived partially or entirely from syngas. For example, as described above, the acetic acid may be formed from methanol and carbon monoxide, both of which may be derived from syngas. For example, the methanol may be formed by steam reforming syngas, and the carbon monoxide may be separated from syngas. In other embodiments, the methanol may be formed in a carbon monoxide unit, e.g., as described in EP2076480; EP1923380; EP2072490; EP1914219; EP1904426; EP2072487; EO2072492; EP2072486; EP2060553; EP1741692; EP1907344; EP2060555; EP2186787; EP2072488; and U.S. Pat. No. 7,842,844, which are hereby incorporated by reference. Of course, this listing of methanol sources is merely exemplary and is not meant to be limiting. The syngas, in turn, may be derived from variety of carbon sources. The carbon source, for example, may be selected from the group consisting of natural gas, oil, petroleum, coal, biomass, and combinations thereof. The raw materials used in connection with the process of this invention may be derived from any suitable source including natural gas, petroleum, coal, biomass, and so forth.

As petroleum and natural gas prices fluctuate becoming either more or less expensive, methods for producing acetic acid intermediates such as methanol and carbon monoxide from alternate carbon sources have drawn increasing interest. In particular, when petroleum is relatively expensive, it may become advantageous to produce acetic acid from synthesis gas ("syngas") that is derived from more available carbon sources. Accordingly, in some embodiments, some or all of the raw materials for the above-described carbonylation may be derived partially or entirely from syngas. For example, both the methanol and carbon monoxide may be derived from syngas. The syngas may be formed by partial oxidation reforming or steam reforming, and the carbon monoxide may be separated from syngas. The syngas, in turn, may be derived from variety of carbon sources. The carbon source, for example, may be selected from the group consisting of natural gas, oil, petroleum, coal, biomass, and combinations thereof. Syngas or hydrogen may also be obtained from bio-derived methane gas, such as bio-derived methane gas produced by landfills or agricultural waste.

Examples of biomass include, but are not limited to, agricultural wastes, forest products, grasses, and other cellulosic material, timber harvesting residues, softwood chips, hardwood chips, tree branches, tree stumps, leaves, bark, sawdust, off-spec paper pulp, corn, corn stover, wheat straw, rice straw, sugarcane bagasse, switchgrass, miscanthus, animal manure, municipal garbage, municipal sewage, commercial waste, grape pumice, almond shells, pecan shells, coconut shells, coffee grounds, grass pellets, hay pellets, wood pellets, cardboard, paper, plastic, and cloth. See, e.g., U.S. Pat. No. 7,884,253, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference. Another biomass source is black liquor, a thick, dark liquid that is a byproduct of the Kraft process for transforming wood into pulp, which is then dried to make paper. Black liquor is an aqueous solution of lignin residues, hemicellulose, and inorganic chemicals.

Also, U.S. Pat. No. RE 35,377, incorporated herein by reference, discloses a method for the production of methanol by conversion of carbonaceous materials such as oil, coal, natural gas and biomass materials. The process includes hydrogasification of solid and/or liquid carbonaceous materials to obtain a process gas which is steam pyrolyzed with

additional natural gas to form synthesis gas. The syngas is converted to methanol which may be carbonylated to acetic acid. The acetic acid, in turn, may be hydrogenated to form ethanol and/or ethanol derivatives. Processes for hydrogenating acetic acid to form ethanol are described, for example, in U.S. Pat. Nos. 7,608,744; 7,863,489; US Publication Nos. US2010/0197985; US2011/0190547; US2011/0190548; US2011/0275862; US2011/0282110; and in U.S. patent application Ser. Nos. 13/197,743; 13/197,738; 13/299,816, each of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

As discussed above, rhodium catalyst precipitation is frequently experienced in product recovery systems, especially flasher units. The benefits of the systems described herein in reducing rhodium catalyst precipitation are exemplified by the following experimental evaluations.

EXAMPLES

In Examples A-Q and 1-32, except where otherwise indicated, various continuous carbonylation reactions were run at bench scale under the following conditions: 1000 wppm rhodium, 190° C., 30 bar CO, 2 wt. % water, 2 wt. % methyl acetate, and 10 wt. % methyl iodide. Observations as to crystallization and precipitation were made at start up and during the reaction run. Except where otherwise indicated, the reactions were run continuously for a maximum of 5-8 hours or were ended before this time period if catalyst crystallization or precipitation were observed. Experiments were repeated on a daily basis up to about 35 total hours unless precipitation or crystallization occurred.

Examples A-Q and 1-32 were run under continuous conditions in a small bench scale zirconium reactor. The unit was operated without a methyl iodide-acetic acid splitter column. A solution of MeI, water, MeOAc and MeOH was fed continuously to the carbonylation reactor, and a flasher overhead crude product containing water, MeI, MeOAc and acetic acid was collected. This solution was analyzed to determine the methanol carbonylation rate, expressed as g-moles acetic acid/L/hr (STY). The methanol carbonylation rates obtained were compared to the CO consumed during the run, expressed as moles CO/L/hr. Rhodium stability was measured based on the amount of rhodium catalyst precipitation or crystallization in the reaction solution at operating conditions during the experiment and at room temperature when taking reactor samples for analysis or at the end of the run.

Comparative Examples A-E

Examples A-E were run with various iodide concentrations, and with all iodide being provided from lithium iodide. No phosphonium co-stabilizer was included. Experimental results are shown in Table 2 and reflect that catalyst stabilization was not achieved until iodide concentrations of 9.5 wt. % and greater.

Comparative Examples F-H

Symmetric Phosphonium Iodide Salts

Examples F-H were run with various symmetric phosphonium iodide (PI) salts, and without lithium iodide. The results are shown in Table 2 and reflect that all runs crystallized even at high iodide concentrations of 9.0 wt. %.

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TABLE 2

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS						
Example	Component	$[I^-]_{PI}$	$[I^-]_{LiI}$	Carb. Rates (mol/l/hr)	Precipitation (P)/Crystallization (C)	
		(wt % iodide)	(wt % iodide)		During Run	Room Temp
A	Rh/LiI	0	4.5	15.5	P	P
B	Rh/LiI	0	6.5	16.5	P	P
C	Rh/LiI	0	9.5	17.5	No	No
D	Rh/LiI	0	14.0	17.3	No	No
E	Rh/LiI	0	20.0	18.1	No	No
F	Rh/Me ₄ PI	9.0	0	12.0	C	C
G	Rh/Et ₄ PI	9.0	0	12.8	C	C
H	Rh/Bu ₄ PI	9.0	0	14.7	C	C

Comparative Examples I-K

Symmetric Phosphonium Iodide Salt+LiI

Examples I-K were run with a combination of symmetric phosphonium iodide salts and lithium iodide at total iodide concentration of 14 wt. %. Crystallization was observed in all runs. Experimental results are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS						
Ex-ample	Component	$[I^-]_{PI}$	$[I^-]_{LiI}$	Carb. Rates (mol/l/hr)	Precipitation (P)/Crystallization (C)	
		(wt % iodide)	(wt % iodide)		During Run	Room Temp
I	Rh/Me ₄ PI/LiI	4.5	9.5	12.0	C	C
J	Rh/Et ₄ PI/LiI	4.5	9.5	14.3	C	C
K	Rh/Bu ₄ PI/LiI	4.5	9.5	15.8	C	C

Examples L, M and 1-17

Dissymmetric Phosphonium Iodide Salts

Examples L, M and 1-17 were run with various dissymmetric phosphonium iodide salts, but without lithium iodide, and at various iodide loadings as shown in Table 4. Stabilization was surprisingly observed at iodide concentrations as low as 4.5 wt. %. Stabilization was not achieved with phenyl-containing phosphonium cations. Experimental results are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS						
Ex-ample	Component	$[I^-]_{PI}$	$[I^-]_{LiI}$	Carb. Rates (mol/l/hr)	Precipitation (P)/Crystallization (C)	
		(wt % iodide)	(wt % iodide)		During Run	Room Temp
1	Rh/Bu ₃ MePI	2.0	0	15.0	P	P
2	Rh/Bu ₃ MePI	3.0	0	15.9	P	C
3	Rh/Bu ₃ MePI	4.5	0	16.0	No	C
4	Rh/Bu ₃ MePI	9.0	0	16.9	No	No
5	Rh/Bu ₃ MePI	20.0	0	16.9	No	No
6	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	1.0	0	14.2	P	P
7	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	2.0	0	15.0	No	C
8	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	4.5	0	16.3	No	C
9	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	9.0	0	16.9	No	No
10	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	20.0	0	17.5	No	No

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TABLE 4-continued

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS						
Ex-ample	Component	$[I^-]_{PI}$	$[I^-]_{LiI}$	Carb. Rates (mol/l/hr)	Precipitation (P)/Crystallization (C)	
		(wt % iodide)	(wt % iodide)		During Run	Room Temp
11	Rh/Bu ₃ OctPI	4.5	0	14.0	No	No
12	Rh/Oct ₃ MePI	4.5	0	14.3	No	No
L	Rh/Ph ₃ EtPI	4.5	0	14.5	C	C
M	Rh/Ph ₃ EtPI	9.0	0	15.0	C	C
13	Rh/(CyHex) ₃ EtPI	4.5	0	15.2	C	C
14	Rh/(CyHex) ₃ EtPI	9.0	0	15.5	No	C
15	Rh/(Hex) ₃ BuPI	4.5	0	14.5	No	C
16	Rh/(Hex) ₃ BuPI	9.0	0	15.0	No	No
17	Rh/(Hex) ₃ BuPI	15.0	0	11.5	No	No

Examples 18-24

Dissymmetric Phosphonium Iodide Salts+LiI

Examples 18-24 were run with various dissymmetric phosphonium iodide salts and lithium iodide and at various total iodide loadings as shown in Table 5 along with the experimental results.

TABLE 5

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS						
Ex.	Component	$[I^-]_{PI}$	$[I^-]_{LiI}$	Carb. Rates (mol/l/hr)	Precipitation (P)/Crystallization (C)	
		(wt % iodide)	(wt % iodide)		During Run	Room Temp
18	Rh/Bu ₃ MePI/LiI	2.0	1.0	15.0	P	C
19	Rh/Bu ₃ MePI/LiI	2.0	4.5	16.2	P	C
20	Rh/Bu ₃ MePI/LiI	4.5	9.5	18.0	No	C
21	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI/LiI	1.0	1.0	14.0	P	P
22	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI/LiI	4.5	9.5	17.5	No	No
23	Rh/Bu ₃ OctPI/LiI	4.5	9.5	16.4	No	C
24	Rh/Oct ₃ MePI/LiI	4.5	9.5	16.5	No	No

Examples N-Q and 25-32

Dissymmetric Phosphonium Iodide at Different Water Concentrations

Examples 25-32 show various combinations of dissymmetric phosphonium iodides at various water concentrations, specifically, 0.5, 1.0 and 5.0 wt. % water. Examples N-Q show comparative examples at various water contents without iodide contribution from a phosphonium iodide. Results are shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS							
Ex.	Component	$[I^-]_{PI}$	$[I^-]_{LiI}$	Water (wt. %)	Carb. Rates (mol/l/hr)	Precipitation (P)/Crystallization (C)	
		(wt % iodide)	(wt % iodide)			During Run	Room Temp
N	Rh/LiI	0	9.5	0.5	3.5	No	No
25	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	9.0	0	0.5	2.6	No	No
26	Rh/Hex ₃ BuPI	9.0	0	0.5	2.9	No	No
O	Rh/LiI	0	9.5	1	14.6	No	No
P	Rh/LiI	0	14.0	1	16.0	No	No

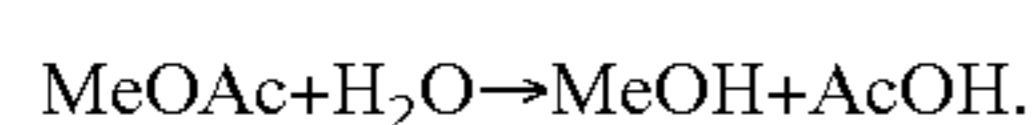
TABLE 6-continued

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS							
Ex.	Component	[I ⁻] _{PI} (wt % iodide)	[I ⁻] _{LiI} (wt % iodide)	Water (wt. %)	Carb. Rates (mol/l/hr)	Precipitation (P)/ Crystallization (C)	Room Temp
27	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	4.5	0	1	15.0	No	C
28	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	9.0	0	1	14.5	No	No
29	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	4.5	9.5	1	16.0	No	No
30	Rh/Hex ₃ BuPI	9.0	0	1	13.3	No	No
Q	Rh/LiI	0	9.5	5	15.6	No	No
31	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	9.0	0	5	15.5	No	No
32	Rh/Hex ₃ BuPI	9.0	0	5	13.5	No	No

Examples R and 33-36

Batch Carbonylation

Except where otherwise indicated, Examples R and 33-36 were run under batch conditions with the following starting conditions: 8 wt. % water, 25 wt % MeOAc, 10 wt. % MeI, 1000 ppm rhodium, 205° C., a total pressure of CO of 30 bar for 4 minutes. Example 35 was started with 1500 ppm rhodium, and Example 36 was started at 5 wt. % water and 15 wt % MeOAc. Results are shown in Table 7. These examples were performed starting with higher MeOAc and water concentrations than continuous experiments in order to form methanol in situ according to the equation:



The methanol was consumed with CO by carbonylation to produce acetic acid. Water and MeOAc concentrations decreased with time depending on the carbonylation rate.

TABLE 7

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS						
Ex.	Component	[I ⁻] _{PI} (wt % iodide)	[I ⁻] _{LiI} (wt % iodide)	Water (wt. %)	Carb. Rates (mol/l/h)	Precipitation (P)/ Crystallization (C)
R	Rh/LiI	0	9.5	4.2	29.4	No
33	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	9.0	0	5.1	21.2	No
34	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	17.0	0	4.4	27.8	No
35	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	17.0	0	2.5	45.0	No
36	Rh/Bu ₃ EtPI	25.0	0	1.5	31.4	No

Examples S-W and 37-54

Extended Continuous Carbonylation

Examples S-W and 37-54 were run under longer extended continuous conditions in a larger reactor than the previous continuous examples without any interruptions in order to demonstrate the longer term thermal and chemical stability of the catalyst system with various dissymmetric phosphonium iodide salts with and without lithium iodide as a catalyst co-promoter/stabilizer at various total iodide loadings as shown in Table 8. Except for varying the total iodide concentrations in the reactor as inorganic iodide such as LiI and/or various organic phosphonium iodide salts, the reaction conditions were repeated in each of these examples to demonstrate the effect of dissymmetric phosphonium iodide salts on catalyst stability.

The continuous homogeneous reaction system employed contained (a) a liquid-phase carbonylation reactor, (b) a flasher, and (c) a methyl iodide-acetic acid splitter column. The carbonylation reactor was a stirred autoclave within which the reacting liquid contents were maintained automatically at a constant level. Into this reactor the following were continuously introduced: fresh methanol, recycled catalyst solution from the flasher base, and recycled methyl iodide, methyl acetate and water from the overhead of the methyl iodide-acetic acid splitter column. Water was maintained in the reaction medium at about 2 wt. %, methyl iodide was maintained at about 10 wt. % and methyl acetate was maintained at about 3.5 wt. %. The residue from the flasher was recirculated to the reactor. Carbon monoxide was continuously introduced into and thoroughly dispersed within the carbonylation reactor. A gaseous purge stream was vented from the head of the reactor to prevent buildup of gaseous by-product and to maintain a set carbon monoxide partial pressure at a given total reactor pressure.

Crude liquid product was drawn off from the carbonylation reactor at a rate sufficient to maintain a constant level therein and was introduced to the flasher at a point intermediate between the top and bottom thereof. In the flasher the catalyst solution was withdrawn as a base stream predominantly containing acetic acid, the rhodium catalyst and the iodide salt along with lesser quantities of methyl acetate, methyl iodide, and water, while the condensed overhead of the flasher comprised largely the crude product, acetic acid, along with methyl iodide, methyl acetate, and water. A portion of the carbon monoxide along with gaseous by-products such as methane, hydrogen, and carbon dioxide exited the top of the flasher.

The dry acetic acid (<1500 ppm water) product was drawn from the base of the methyl iodide-acetic acid splitter column (it can also be withdrawn as a side stream near the base) for final purification as desired. The overhead from the methyl iodide-acetic acid splitter, comprising mainly methyl iodide, methyl acetate and water, was recycled to the carbonylation reactor.

Because of the longer continuous operating periods for these experiments, to maintain a constant reactor rhodium concentration during the experiments, a dilute concentration of rhodium acetate (300-700 wppm) was fed continuously to the reactor (mg Rh/hr), "rhodium usage," to compensate for long term rhodium loss by precipitation of insoluble rhodium triiodide (RhI₃) in the flasher. Rhodium stability in these experiments is measured by the rhodium usage. The results, shown in Table 8 and FIG. 2, clearly demonstrate enhanced rhodium stability (lower rhodium usage) when using dissymmetric phosphonium iodide salts with or without an inorganic iodide salt. In all of these experiments, no precipitation or crystallization of the catalyst from the reactor solution at room temperature was observed when samples were taken periodically for analysis.

TABLE 8

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS & REACTOR CONDITIONS								
Ex.	Component	Run Time (hrs)	Rh Feed (mg/ hr)	Iodide as Bu ₃ RPI (wt %)	Iodide as LiI (wt %)	Iodide Total (wt %)	HOAc Rh (ppm)	HOAc STY (Mol/ hr-L)
S	LiI	114	24.3	0	10.1	9.6	1114	17.4
37	Bu ₃ MePI	44	0	5.6	0	5.6	1108	15.5
38	Bu ₃ MePI	168	0	7.8	0	7.8	1523	25.8
T	LiI	112	14.8	0	9.1	10	1149	19.3

TABLE 8-continued

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS & REACTOR CONDITIONS								
Ex.	Component	Run Time (hrs)	Rh Feed (mg/hr)	Iodide as Bu ₃ RPI (wt %)	Iodide as LiI (wt %)	Iodide Total (wt %)	Rh (ppm)	HOAc STY (Mol/hr-L)
39	Bu ₃ EtPI + LiI	89	0	4.3	8.3	13.3	1365	16.3
U	LiI	72	13.8	0	10.5	9.9	1182	28.4
40	Bu ₃ EtPI + LiI	42	7.4	0.6	10.1	10.7	1365	30.0
41	Bu ₃ EtPI + LiI	78	3.6	1.6	8.7	11.7	1338	29.3
42	Bu ₃ EtPI + LiI	51	0	2.4	8.6	12.5	1323	27.5
43	Bu ₃ EtPI + LiI	72	1.9	2.3	8.7	12.1	1248	27.3
44	Bu ₃ EtPI + LiI	214	2.5	2.7	8.7	12	1130	25.4
V	LiI	113	17.4	0	9.3	10.1	1148	27.8
45	Bu ₃ EtPI + LiI	161	4.3	1.6	9	10.9	1136	27.8
46	Bu ₃ EtPI + LiI	168	7.4	1.4	8.1	10	967	23
W	LiI	112	14.8	0	9.1	10	1149	19.3
47	Bu ₃ EtPI	89	0	4.3	8.3	13.3	1365	16.3
48	Bu ₃ EtPI	104	15.4	2.1	0	2.5	1107	18.3
49	Bu ₃ EtPI	92	8.7	2.4	0	2.7	1107	18.3
50	Bu ₃ EtPI	23	2.8	3.1	0	3.7	1169	19
51	Bu ₃ EtPI	60	2	3	0	3.5	1049	18.1
52	Bu ₃ EtPI	108	1.2	4.3	0	4.8	1038	18.5
53	Bu ₃ EtPI	32	3.4	4.1	0	4.5	949	17.7
54	Bu ₃ EtPI	122	1.6	5	0	5.6	926	18

While the invention has been described in detail, modifications within the spirit and scope of the invention will be readily apparent to those of skill in the art. It should be understood that aspects of the invention and portions of various embodiments and various features recited above and/or in the appended claims may be combined or interchanged either in whole or in part. In the foregoing descriptions of the various embodiments, those embodiments which refer to another embodiment may be appropriately combined with other embodiments as will be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art. Furthermore, those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the foregoing description is by way of example only, and is not intended to limit the invention.

We claim:

1. A process for producing acetic acid, the process comprising the steps of:

reacting carbon monoxide in the liquid phase with at least one reactant selected from the group consisting of methanol, methyl acetate, methyl formate, dimethyl ether and mixtures thereof in a reactor containing a reaction medium to produce a liquid reaction product comprising acetic acid, wherein the reaction medium comprises a finite amount of water, a homogeneous catalyst, an alkyl halide promoter, and a catalyst stabilizer comprising a dissymmetric phosphonium cation [PR₁R₂R₃R₄]⁺ as an iodide salt, wherein R₁, R₂, R₃, and R₄ are each independently a C₂ or greater substituted or unsubstituted alkyl or cycloalkyl; and

maintaining the reaction medium at a total iodide ion concentration of from 2 to 35 wt. % and an alkyl halide promoter concentration of greater than 1 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

2. The process of claim 1, wherein R₁, R₂, R₃, and R₄ are not all the same substituted or unsubstituted alkyl or cycloalkyl group.

3. The process of claim 1, wherein the phosphonium cation is maintained in the reaction medium at a concentration of from 1.5 wt. % to 28 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

4. The process of claim 1, wherein the water concentration in the reaction medium is maintained at from 0.1 wt. % to 8 wt. %.

5. The process of claim 1, wherein the process has a carbonylation rate from 10 to 40 mol/l/hr.

6. The process of claim 1, wherein the process has a carbonylation rate from 15 to 20 mol/l/hr.

7. The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction medium is maintained at a total iodide ion to catalyst molar ratio of from 25:1 to 950:1.

8. The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction medium further comprises a metal iodide salt.

9. The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction medium further comprises an alkali or alkaline earth metal iodide salt at a phosphonium to alkali or alkaline earth metal molar ratio of from 1:10 to 10:1.

10. The process of claim 1, wherein the homogeneous catalyst comprises rhodium.

11. The process of claim 1, wherein at least 99% of the homogeneous catalyst remains solubilized in the reaction medium when cooled to at least 20° C.

12. The process of claim 1, wherein the alkyl halide promoter is maintained in the reaction medium at a concentration greater than 5 wt. %.

13. The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction medium further comprises methyl acetate, the process further comprising the step of maintaining the reaction medium at a methyl acetate concentration from 0.5 to 20 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

14. The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction medium further comprises methyl acetate, the process further comprising the step of maintaining the reaction medium at a methyl acetate concentration from 0.5 to 10 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

15. The process of claim 1, wherein the reaction medium is maintained at a total iodide concentration from 3 to 35 wt. %.

16. The process of claim 1, wherein the catalyst stabilizer has a melting point less than 170° C.

17. The process of claim 1, wherein the catalyst stabilizer is a liquid at 25° C.

18. The process of claim 1, wherein the catalyst stabilizer comprises tributyl(ethyl)phosphonium ion.

19. The process of claim 1, wherein the catalyst stabilizer comprises tributyl(octyl)phosphonium ion.

20. The process of claim 1, wherein the catalyst stabilizer comprises trioctyl(ethyl)phosphonium ion.

21. The process of claim 1, wherein R₁, R₂ and R₃ are identical and selected from the group consisting of C₆ (hexyl), C₈ (octyl), C₁₀ (decyl), C₁₂ (dodecyl), C₁₄ (tetradecyl), C₁₆ (hexadecyl), cyclopentyl, and cyclohexyl, and R₄ is a C₂ or greater alkyl.

22. The process of claim 21, wherein R₄ is selected from the group consisting of C₂ (ethyl), C₄ (butyl), C₅ (pentyl), C₆ (hexyl), C₈ (octyl), C₁₀ (decyl) and C₁₂ (dodecyl).

23. The process of claim 1, wherein the catalyst stabilizer is selected from the group consisting of tris(2-methylpropyl)(butyl)phosphonium iodide, tris(2-methylbutyl)(3-methylbutyl)phosphonium iodide, tricyclohexyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, tridecyl(octyl)phosphonium iodide, trioctyl(decyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(butyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(octyl)phosphonium iodide and mixtures thereof.

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24. A process for producing acetic acid, the process comprising the steps of:

reacting carbon monoxide in the liquid phase with at least one reactant selected from the group consisting of methanol, methyl acetate, methyl formate, dimethyl ether and mixtures thereof in a reactor containing a reaction medium to produce a liquid reaction product comprising acetic acid, wherein the reaction medium comprises a finite amount of water, a homogeneous catalyst, an alkyl halide promoter, and a catalyst stabilizer comprising a phosphonium cation $[R_3PR']^+$ or $[R_2PR'_2]^+$ wherein R is straight or branched butyl, hexyl, or octyl or cycloalkyl; and R' is ethyl, propyl, or straight or branched butyl, hexyl, octyl, decyl, dodecyl, tetradecyl or hexadecyl or cycloalkyl, with the proviso that R and R' are different; and

maintaining the reaction medium at a total iodide ion concentration of from 2 to 35 wt. % and an alkyl halide promoter concentration of greater than 1 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

25. The process of claim 24, wherein the phosphonium cation is present in the reaction medium at a concentration of from 1.5 wt. % to 28 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

26. The process of claim 24, wherein the water concentration in the reaction medium is maintained from 0.1 wt. % to 8 wt. %.

27. The process of claim 24, wherein the process has a carbonylation rate from 10 to 40 mol/l/hr.

28. The process of claim 24, wherein the process has a carbonylation rate from 15 to 20 mol/l/hr.

29. The process of claim 24, wherein the reaction medium is maintained at a total iodide ion to catalyst molar ratio from 25:1 to 950:1.

30. The process of claim 24, wherein the reaction medium further comprises a metal iodide salt.

31. The process of claim 24, wherein the reaction medium further comprises an alkali or alkaline earth metal iodide at a phosphonium to alkali or alkaline earth metal molar ratio of from 1:10 to 10:1.

32. The process of claim 24, wherein the homogeneous catalyst comprises rhodium.

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33. The process of claim 24, wherein at least 99% of the homogeneous catalyst remains solubilized in the reaction medium when cooled to at least 20° C.

34. The process of claim 24, wherein the alkyl halide promoter is maintained in the reaction medium at a concentration greater than 5 wt. %.

35. The process of claim 24, wherein the reaction medium further comprises methyl acetate, the process further comprising the step of maintaining the reaction medium at a methyl acetate concentration from 0.5 to 20 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

36. The process of claim 24, wherein the reaction medium further comprises methyl acetate, the process further comprising the step of maintaining the reaction medium at a methyl acetate concentration from 0.5 to 10 wt. %, based on the total weight of the reaction medium.

37. The process of claim 24, wherein the reaction medium is maintained at a total iodide concentration from 3 to 35 wt. %.

38. The process of claim 24, wherein catalyst stabilizer has a melting point less than 170° C.

39. The process of claim 24, wherein the catalyst stabilizer is a liquid at 25° C.

40. The process of claim 24, wherein R and R' are C₂₊ alkyl groups.

41. The process of claim 24, wherein the catalyst stabilizer comprises tributyl(ethyl)phosphonium ion.

42. The process of claim 24, wherein the catalyst stabilizer comprises tributyl(octyl)phosphonium ion.

43. The process of claim 24, wherein the catalyst stabilizer comprises trioctyl(ethyl)phosphonium ion.

44. The process of claim 24, wherein R' is selected from the group consisting of C₂ (ethyl), C₄ (butyl), C₆ (hexyl), C₈ (octyl), C₁₀ (decyl) and C₁₂ (dodecyl).

45. The process of claim 24, wherein the catalyst stabilizer is selected from the group consisting of tris(2-methylpropyl)(butyl)phosphonium iodide, tris(2-methylbutyl)(3-methylbutyl)phosphonium iodide, tricyclohexyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(ethyl)phosphonium iodide, tridecyl(octyl)phosphonium iodide, trioctyl(decyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(butyl)phosphonium iodide, trihexyl(octyl)phosphonium iodide and mixtures thereof.

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